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ABSTRACT

Described are several villages or schools for handicapped adults or children based on the anthroposophic (the wisdom of man) philosophy of R. Steiner and located in Norway, West Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The anthroposophic homes, schools, and villages are seen to provide a positive alternative to more traditional forms of institutional care due to such reasons as 1) respect for the child as a person regardless of the severity of handicap, 2) the existence of both a moral philosophy and a clearly formulated educational theory, and 3) the concern of curative education for all aspects of a child's development. (DB)

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Impressions from Anthropomophic Communities

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The anthroposophic (the wisdom of man) movement was started in the beginning of this century by an Austrian philosopher and social and educational reformer called Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). His philosophical and educational ideas are complex and esoteric. Still they have provided the impetus for reforms in regular education and new and challenging approaches in the treatment of the handicapped.

Steiner's educational ideas are called the Waldorf Method. It is based on the assumption that the child goes through several stages of development. The gradual unfolding of the child's personality is supported by appropriate learning experiences. Steiner soon found that his teaching methods had particular usefulness with handicapped children. In 1924 he founded a school for special children, and the same year he published a number of lectures on what is called "curative education for children in need of special care." One of the central ideas of the anthroposophists is that regardless of the severity of the handicap, the child's innate soul or personality is still intact. It can be guided in its unfolding through proper medical attention, education, close human and family relationships, meaningful community participation, work, art, leisure and worship

In the early forties Karl Konig founded the first village for adult handicapped on a farm called Camphill in Scotland. Later other Camphill villages have been built in many parts of the world. In some countries the anthroposophic institutions contribute significantly to the spectrum of services provided for the handicapped, and there is much positive

public interest in what they do. For example, in 1974 there was a four weeks exhibition on curative education in Stockholm, Sweden. It was attended by 35,000 people and received much favorable attention in the press.

In this presentation, I shall start with a somewhat detailed description of a Camphill village in Norway. Then will follow a portrayal of a cluster of therapeutic communities in West Germany, a group of anthroposophically oriented homes, schools and employment centers in Sweden, a school in the Netherlands, and a village in Switzerland. At the end, some conclusions will be made.

Norway

The Vidaraasen Village is situated in Southern Norway, about eighty miles southwest of Oslo. It nestles in a small secluded valley about twenty miles inland from the coastal city of Sandefjord. Pine covered hills surround the hundred acre farm. A gravel road leads past similar small farms to the rural community of Andebu about three miles away. At Vidaraasen the old farm buildings are still standing, but half hidden among the trees and the rocks there are several recent houses built in a Swiss chateau style. These houses have been erected with funds collected by high school students. Every year at Christmas high school students sell candles made at Vidaraasen and from the profit a new house is built. In the village there are about thirty villagers and twenty co-workers. They are divided into family groups with an average of six or seven to the group. Each family has its own home with kitchen, living room, dining room and individual bedrooms.

FAMILY

One of the corner stones of village life is the family milieu. Each member belongs to a family which has its own house, house keeping, and it

keeps its own accounts. Although the house parents have the major responsibility, tasks are distributed as evenly as possible among villagers and co-workers. There is much sharing and joint decision making, and the family members work together on the many problems and issues that arise in a typical family. Meal times are important occasions for all to gather and talk over the day's events. There are many festive events, and a weekly party with special treats. Through his participation in a small family unit in which he is a valued and contributing member, the villager builds up his own feeling of importance and social belonging.

WORK

A second essential aspect of the village milieu is the importance of work. Work is the backbone of the village community. Through work the villager experiences his own ability to create and produce and he develops new vocational and social skills.

At Vidaraasen there is a carpentry shop, two shops for basket weaving, that also produce a variety of beautiful Christmas ornaments; a weavery, a shop for making candles, a doll making shop, and a nursery. In the summer the farm requires many helping hands. During the summer vacations many young students from the surrounding communities serve as volunteers to the mutual benefit of all.

To the extent that it is possible the villagers experienced the natural sequences of production. They participate in buying the raw materials, they produce the commodities and they take them to market. The villagers take pride in seeing their products on display in fashionable stores in the capital.

All the things produced in the village are in great demand, not only because of the affection the people have for the village but because of

the genuinely high quality of its products.

LEISURE

A third pillar in the village life is the creative use of leisure time. Music and singing are among the most popular activities. Next come the theater and acting. The villagers enjoy both folk dancing and modern dance, and some are engaged in painting, modeling, or foreign language instruction. There are frequent lectures and films of general interest and the villagers attend many cultural events in the neighboring towns. Sports are also popular, especially swimming and skiing.

INTERNATIONAL

Another striking feature of the village is its international characters. There is a constant going and coming of co-workers from villages in other countries who spend a period of time to learn or to teach or to help out with special projects.

During our stay we met a young lady from Botton Village in Scotland who was learning farming. A couple from Sweden was helping to build a bakery and to instruct the village population in the art of biodynamic bread-making.

The villagers represent the broad range of the usual psychiatric categories: mental retardation, brain damage, epilepsy, psychosis, neuroses, conduct disorders. They have one thing in common. They have been unable to function in the community at large.

The village milieu does not meet everyone's needs. For example, a psychopathic hypochondriac who insisted on spending all day in bed, eventually decided to leave. A drifter who was also a compulsive thief could not adapt himself to the expectations of community life.

The failures were reduced as the village expanded and was able to meet and adapt to a wider range of personality problems.

Additionally all newcomers have a trial or vacation period before a mutual agreement is made about their continued stay.

Some of the handicapped do not change much after they join the village. But most show considerable growth in personal maturity and in their capacity for social life.

It is expected that some of the villagers will want to return to ordinary society after they have developed greater self-confidence, better social adjustment and further vocational skills. However, for most of the people who come for help the village will become their permanent abode.

West Germany

The hilly landscape north of the Lake of Constance provides the scenic setting for several anthroposophic communities. There are three curative schools for children, one full-sized village for adults and older adolescents, and two that are still in the process of development. There is also a treatment center for drug addicts and a box factory where about 25 handicapped villages from the different communities work.

We had an opportunity to visit the special school at Fohrenbühl. The school has over one hundred multiply handicapped children. Almost without exception cerebral palsy is the central problem, but many also have sensory defects, mental retardation and psychiatric difficulties. The children live in group homes. Music, painting, eurythmy, and drama are important parts of the curriculum. The child is helped to see himself at home in a broadening circle of relationships, in the family group, the village, the country, and the world community. An impressive innovation is the new school building. The central hallway spirals upwards. The first grade classroom is at the bottom. It is almost round in shape.

For each succeeding grade the classroom becomes a polygon with fewer and fewer sides, as if gradually releasing the child from an embrace. The pupils are also daily reminded of how far they have come and how far they have to go. The children go to elementary school from when they are seven to 14 years old. Then they attend a high school for three years. After that some go back to ordinary society, while others proceed to adult villages.

The high school is actually a school for work and vocational training. The building is new and it is exceptionally well equipped with tools and materials. Many of the things made there have commercial value, and they are sold in a little shop.

Lehenhof is an adult village or Dorfgemeinschaft. It is situated on a wooded hillside. To the south the snow-clad Swiss Alps furnish an ever-present fairyland backdrop. The village consists of a farm, a museum, an administration building which also has hospital facilities, several structures for workshops, a church and eleven houses for individual "families." The buildings are mostly all new and well kept and an abundance of flowers and bushes help create an idyllic atmosphere.

The community has about 150 members. There are 85 villagers, 45 co-workers and 20 children belonging to the co-workers. The villagers are moderately to severely retarded. Some are spastic and a number of them are in wheel chairs. A few also have psychiatric disorders and "contact" disturbances. They live together as families. The visitor had the pleasure of being the guest at the Falk Haus for several days. There were nine adult mentally retarded members, the house parents, Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz with their two children, and two practicum students. The house parents lived upstairs where there was also a guest room. The rest had their individual or double rooms on the first floor, which also had a kitchen and a large living and dining room.

The meals are shared together and everybody helps out setting the table and washing dishes.

The villagers all have their jobs to do. Those working on the farm must be up early. The others are of to work at eight o'clock.

The production aspects are varied and well adapted to the individual abilities and limitations of the villagers. The farm and the nursery provide much of the food for the community. The bakery makes the bread which is also in much demand in surrounding towns. A workshop has machines that weave cloth for the making of woollen underwear which is also much sought after. Wool is also made into thread used in the weaving and knitting workshops. The village is part owner of a box facotry some miles away and several workers get on the bus every morning to go there. Sales bring in a profit of about $200.000 a year which helps substantially in keeping down the cost of maintaining the village.

The villagers enjoy a rich social, cultural and spiritual life. When a villager in the Falk Haus, Peter, celebrated his 50th birthday, he had visitors all day from other houses and villages. They brought gifts and flowers, and they sang songs together and had refreshments. During it all Peter walked around with a beam on his face while he was shaking hands and hugging his friends. His constant phrase was "Ich danke, Ich danke." "I thank you , I thank you."

Saturday night has a special ceremony. The family gathers in a circle in the living room. All is dark except for a candle in the middle of the room. After a quiet period of about five minutes, more candles are lit and the group sits around the dining room table for a Bible reading. The visitor participated in an animated discussion of

some lines from the Revelations. Only two or three of the villagers had much to say, but all were deeply attentive. Afterwards there was a serving of bread and a fruit drink and all went to bed.

Sunday morning most of the villagers went to church. Although the anthroposophic movement is in a sense nondenominational it has its own clergy and its own ritual. The service was simple and short and the sermon has a celebration of life theme. The minister talked about the beauty of nature, the love of God and the joy of being together.

Of special significance in the life of the village is the celebration of the great religious events such as Christmas. The villagers re-enact these events in dramatic play and with music and dance.

The handicapped participate in decision making in their houses, in the workshops and in the whole village community. In their homes minor matters are decided in a free and open exchange of ideas at meal times as in any family.

Financial support for the village comes largely from state and federal disability insurance and from other governmental provisions for institutional care. Thus the co-workers receive salaries according to their professional and educational status, such as physicians, social workers, teachers, child care workers. These funds go into the village coffers and are then distributed according to need. Since the village also receives some direct and indirect income from its industries and from farming, it can maintain a high standard of living and also have surplus for expansion and for founding new village communities. Some of the inhabitants were actually devoting their time to the building of another village in the neighborhood and there was much excitement about the fact that it was near completion.

Heilstatte Sieben Zwerge or the Seven Dwarves Treatment Center is a curative facility for young drug addicts. Started in 1972, it has rapidly gained international attention for its unique and promising therapeutic methods. The physical facilities consist of a new comprehensive services building that includes a hospital, and administrative offices, an apartment building for the patients, a special house where four mothers with drug problems live with their children and house parents, staff homes, a farm with about seventy head of cattle and a large vegetable garden, a carpentry shop and a small factory for the production of natural colors for paints.

Many of the patients are physically debilitated and sick when they arrive. They are first given medical care based on anthroposophic principles. Then they are introduced to the simple and secure rhythms and activities of life that characterize an anthroposophic community. Of particular therapeutic value for many young people is the farm and the responsibilities and satisfactions connected with helping to grow things and taking care of animals.

The recovery rate so far is an astounding 19 out of 20. A crucial aspect of this positive change is a radical alteration of values in the direction of a more spiritual life style.

Sweden

The town of Jarna and the region around it have for more than 40 years been a center for anthroposophic activities. There has been a steady and continuing growth and expansion. In addition to several curative facilities, there are several farms run by anthroposophists, a research center for biodynamic agriculture, a mill and a bakery for biodynamic bread, a Waldord school for normal children, and a four-year

college which among other things trains teachers in curative education.

The communities for children include Mikaelgaarden with 40 children in seven families, Mora Park with 14 children, and Solbergahemmet with 49 children. The kinds of problems presented vary greatly. Most of the children have low intellectual functioning due to mental retardation or psychoses. Some of the children are autistic or have autistic tendencies. Brain damage, epilepsy, and character disturbances are also common. The children live in an ambience of family-like closeness, much individual attention and individualized treatment. It is considered important that children with different kinds of problems live together because each child is believed to have some strengths that he can lend to others. This arrangement has met with opposition from governmental funding agencies, which insist on segregation based on the nature of the handicap.

For the older youths and young adults, several centers have been developed. Saltaa Arbettskola has room for 35 young men. In addition to running a farm, they have workshops for instruction in carpentry, woodcutting, metal work, weaving, basket-making, and ceramics. A special display room had for exhibition or sale some of the art work. Several of the wood carvings were of exceptional beauty and originality. Much of the day is also spent on gymnastics, eurythmy, and music making. The music teacher had invented a string instrument to be played by two. The two players sit facing each other while they play. It was an ideal way of drawing upon the factors of attention, relationship and imitation which are so important in introducing a child or young person to music.

Telleby Verksteder is a sheltered workshop in the outskirts of Jarna in an area with small industries. It employs about 25 developmentally disabled adults. Most of them live in group homes in the town. The founder and director is Dutch and was previously an administrator of

workshops in the Netherlands. The factory produces a number of musical instruments such as xylophones of different degrees of complexity. But the main products are a special kind of flutes called Choroi. The flutes vary in complexity to fit the different ages and developmental levels of children and are particularly well adapted to the mentally retarded and other handicapped children and adults.

Solaakrabyn is a third curative facility for young adults. It has room for 54 handicapped men and women who learn vocational and occupational skills while having sheltered employment.

The anthroposophic communities at Jarna keep in close contact with similar centers in other parts of Sweden, including the well known Aarstahemmet in Stockholm. There is much sharing of information and ideas and even movement of handicapped persons when it is believed another place might be more suited to their needs.

The Netherlands

The anthroposophic movement has taken strong roots in the Netherlands, and there are about a dozen institutes of curative education for children in different parts of the country. One of them is House Christophorus near Utrecht. It cares for about 60 developmentally disabled children. They live in several large houses that were once private residences in an opulent and quiet suburban district. The center has a reputation for its many innovative approaches in working with children, who often have severe and debilitating handicaps. One method is a form of color and movement therapy, by which the teacher, flooded by multi-colored lights, stands behind a white screen and moves softly to music. Watching this tends to be relaxing to children troubled by spasticity and emotional disorders. Music therapy is also a highly developed art, and all aspects

of music and singing are used for specific therapeutic purposes.

Switzerland

Near Geneva a Camphill village has existed for two decades. It is called Aigues-Vertes, and has about 50 adolescent and adult villagers and 20 co-workers. The village is partly self-sustaining and has agriculture and gardening, workshops for weaving, carpentry, metals, and doll-making, as well as a bakery. The products are of high quality and much in demand. With the considerable progress made in integrating and providing sheltered employment for the handicapped in Geneva, the developmental levels of the villagers is going steadily down. This creates increasing stress on the therapeutic community, a phenomenon recognized in several countries.

Conclusions

The anthroposophic homes, schools and villages for the handicapped in Europe are rapidly gaining attention as a positive alternative to other and more traditional forms of institutional care. The reasons for this are several.

1) The anthroposophists show an unconditional respect and reverence for the child as a person regardless of the severity of his handicap.
2) Every child is considered as having a contribution to make for the betterment of people around him. The children and adults in these settings are gifts to be appreciated.
3) There is a clear and elevated moral philosophy as well as a clearly formulated educational theory underlying their programs.
4) Curative education pays equal attention to all the aspects of a child's development: intellectual, emotional, social,

vocational, artistic, and religious and weave them into all the daily activities.

5) Anthroposophic centers have been exceptionally imaginative in creating new tools and new approaches to reach children with special needs.

6) The anthroposophic view of the child and his need to be a part of a caring community is in harmony with much recent thinking about the integration of the handicapped.

7) Perhaps the most important reason for the growing appeal of these gentle counter-culture communes is the fact that they offer an alternative to the obsession in our Western world with technological progress, power, wealth, and conspicuous consumption.

It is an encouraging sign that some of these curative communities are flourishing in the United States where they draw some of their inspiration from the dreams of our own American idealists, Emerson and Thoreau.